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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

POETRY'S BANQUET



AT the dinner given in honor of Mr. William Butler Yeats by the guarantors, contributors and editors of POETRY, in the rooms of the Cliff-Dwellers, Chicago, on the evening of March first, the Irish poet took occasion to warn his confreres in America against a number of besetting sins. He said, in part:

Twenty-five years ago a celebrated writer from South Africa said she lived in the East End of London because only there could she see the faces of people without a mask. To this Oscar Wilde replied that he lived in the West End because nothing interested him but the mask. After a week of lecturing I am too tired to assume a mask, so I will address my remarks especially to a fellow craftsman. For since coming to Chicago I have read several times a poem by Mr. Lindsay, one which will be in the anthologies, *General Booth Enters Into Heaven*. This poem is stripped bare of ornament; it has an earnest simplicity, a strange beauty, and you know Bacon said, "There is no excellent beauty without strangeness."

I have lived a good many years and have read many writers. When I was younger than Mr. Lindsay, and was beginning to write in Ireland, there was all around me the rhetorical poetry of the Irish politicians. We young writers rebelled against that rhetoric; there was too much of it and to a great extent it was meaningless. When I went to London I found a group of young lyric writers who were also against rhetoric. We formed the Rhymers' Club; we used to meet and read our poems to one another, and we tried to rid them of rhetoric.

But now, when I open the ordinary American magazine, I find that all we rebelled against in those early days—the sentimentality, the rhetoric, the "moral uplift"—still exist here. Not be-

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cause you are too far from England, but because you are too far from Paris.

It is from Paris that nearly all the great influences in art and literature have come, from the time of Chaucer until now. Today the metrical experiments of French poets are overwhelming in their variety and delicacy. The best English writing is dominated by French criticism; in France is the great critical mind.

The Victorian forgot this; also, they forgot the austerity of art and began to preach. When I saw Paul Verlaine in Paris, he told me that he could not translate Tennyson because he was "too *Anglais*, too noble"—"when he should be broken-hearted he has too many reminiscences."

We in England, our little group of rhymers, were weary of all this. We wanted to get rid not only of rhetoric but of poetic diction. We tried to strip away everything that was artificial, to get a style like speech, as simple as the simplest prose, like a cry of the heart.

Real enjoyment of a beautiful thing is not achieved when a poet tries to teach. It is not the business of a poet to instruct his age. He should be too humble to instruct his age. His business is merely to express himself, whatever that self may be. I would have all American poets keep in mind the example of Francois Villon.

So you who are readers should encourage American poets to strive to become very simple, very humble. Your poet must put the fervor of his life into his work, giving you his emotions before the world, the evil with the good, not thinking whether he is a good man or a bad man, or whether he is teaching you. A poet does not know whether he is a good man. If he is a good man, he probably thinks he is a bad man.

Poetry that is naturally simple, that might exist as the simplest prose, should have instantaneousness of effect, provided it finds the right audience. You may have to wait years for that audience, but when it is found that instantaneousness of effect is produced.

To illustrate his points, Mr. Yeats read a few poems. Of *An Epitaph*, by Mr. Walter De La Mare, he said, "There is not an original sentence in this short poem, yet it will live for centuries." He spoke of Mr. T. Sturge Moore as "one

of the most exquisite poets writing in England; his poetry is a glorification of instinct." *Our Lady*, by Miss Mary E. Coleridge, he read as an example of "poetry as simple as daily speech." Continuing, he said:

We rebelled against rhetoric, and now there is a group of younger poets who dare to call us rhetorical. When I returned to London from Ireland, I had a young man go over all my work with me to eliminate the abstract. This was an American poet, Ezra Pound. Much of his work is experimental; his work will come slowly, he will make many an experiment before he comes into his own. I should like to read to you two poems of permanent value, *The Ballad of the Goodly Fere* and *The Return*. This last is, I think, the most beautiful poem that has been written in the free form, one of the few in which I find real organic rhythm. A great many poets use *vers libre* because they think it is easier to write than rhymed verse, but it is much more difficult.

The whole movement of poetry is toward pictures, sensuous images, away from rhetoric, from the abstract, toward humility. But I fear I am now becoming rhetorical. I have been driven into Irish public life—how can I avoid rhetoric?

Mr. Yeats then read a few poems from a group which will be printed next month in *POETRY*. Mr. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay followed with his powerful poem, *The Congo*, an interpretation of the African race, which will soon appear in the *Metropolitan Magazine*; also, by request, *General Booth Enters into Heaven*.

A few brief remarks preceded the talk of Mr. Yeats. The editor of *POETRY*, in welcoming the distinguished guest, said, "We honor a great art by honoring its greatest living artist;" and expressed the hope that the magazine might help prepare an audience for the poet who will come: "If we may do for him what Mr. Yeats did for Synge, our efforts will not be without reward."

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Mr. Charles L. Hutchinson, one of the magazine's guarantors, and Mr. Charles H. Hamill, of the Administrative Committee, urged the value of the movement for more appreciative recognition of the art. Mr. Richard Henry Little philosophized about symbolism. A poem of salutation and regret was read from Miss Edith Wyatt, whom an engagement of long standing had called to Bryn Mawr. Mr. Roy McWilliams was toastmaster.

To Mr. Arthur Davison Ficke was accorded the honor of introducing Mr. Yeats with the following poem:

In days when we were twenty,
From over-seas there came
Horns of a silver music,
Words of a singing flame—
As on a wind far-blowing
From hills of faery name.

Strange, cadencing, soft, grave,
It took our hearts in keep.
We heard the Red Hound coursing
Through the pale mists of the deep.
We saw Edain and Dectora—
Beautiful, deathless, asleep.

Now days have flickered by us,
Not silencing that strain.
The red wrath of Cuchulain
Shouts through the hills again;
And every April wakes in the world
Deirdre's immortal pain.

Tonight these breathe and eddy
Dimly around the board,
Robbing our lips of greeting
Worthy the heart that poured
That song of the white arms of desire,
And terror and the sword.

Comments and Reviews

What greeting can we offer him
Whom the gods have loved so long—
Whom the Old-World gods have chosen
Their singer to the throng?
The New World can but bring him now
The love of men for his song.

The song outlasts the singer,
Whose breath in the song shall live.
The lighted dreams of man remain
Though man is fugitive.
One thing the gods withheld from the world—
Beauty—for man to give.

REVIEWS

Twelve Japanese Painters, by Arthur Davison Ficke. Ralph Fletcher Seymour Co., Chicago.

This book belongs in any studio that affects the Japanese print. It is forty-seven pages of Baedeker for the man who would travel toward Fuji San. It is inspired verse. It is good criticism. It is sound aesthetics. I do not see how any one who cares for prints can read it indifferently.

Mr. Ficke's particular faculty is flawlessness—from the mosaic standpoint: one inevitable little word after another. His hold on me depends upon the fact that in his best pieces this self-command never fails. One might say that by mere polish he moves the heart. His longer, more diffuse works have never moved me. His type of concentration seems, so far, impossible for him to achieve in art units that require more than three pages of print to each unit.

After going through this particular book of seventeen poems, with every person in Springfield with whom I dare